

Ye Come Together, Not For The Better

"But in giving you this charge, I praise ye not, that ye come together, not for the better but for the worse" (1 Cor. 11:17).

The word "but" at the beginning of this verse would seem to be connected with the discussion which had just previously been dealt with: the discussion of the woman's covering. However, a further reading of the context shows the apostle has begun addressing an entirely new subject. The sole connecting thread to two subjects is that possibly both related to the assembly but which point some object to. These affirm that the instructions about the covering applied to all public appearances of the woman, not just the assembly of the church. However one view the matter: Paul does launch into correcting another Corinthian problem and the apostle's words, "*But in giving you this charge,*" is his introduction to it. Two significant matters are dealt with in this chapter; the first of which is introduced by "*Now I praise you that ye remember me in all things and hold fast the traditions, even as I delivered them unto you;*" the second is introduced thus: "*But in giving you this charge, I praise ye not.*"

While there is perhaps some uncertainty whether Paul sought to regulate matters "in the assembly" when he taught about the covering, there is no question the second problem does deal with irregularities connected with it. He is specific. Their "*coming together was not for the better for the worse*" and when they "*come together in the church, there were divisions among them*" (1 Cor. 11:17-18). The first problem in the book was division: each one was saying, "*I am of Paul, and I of Apollos, and I of Cephas, and I am of Christ*" (1 Cor. 1:12). The divisions he addresses in this section was a "social division": a contrast between the "haves" and the "have nots". Paul wrote that "*there must be factions among you, that they that are approved may be made manifest among you*" (1 Cor. 11:19). This division was connected with their observance of the Lord's Supper, which in their present state of mind, it was not possible they could do (1 Cor. 11:20). He does not say they failed to eat the bread or drink the cup, that they did; but their attitude toward each other and the additions they made to it rendered it impossible to eat the supper in such a way that Christ's death was properly honored. "*For in your eating each one taketh before the other his own supper and one is hungry and another is drunken*" (1 Cor. 11:21). Somehow the Corinthians had attached a common meal to the Lord's Supper -- whether as a "carry over" from pagan feasts to honor an idol or an attempt to celebrate the Lord's Supper with the Passover meal from Judaism. In either instance, the practice was an unauthorized practice -- an addition.

It would be senseless to deny that the Corinthian church was involved ostensibly in a social meal in addition to the Lord's Supper -- we say "ostensibly" because there was nothing "social" about it. It was not the present day "pot luck" meal in which all brought and all shared in whatever was set forth; in Corinth each person brought and ate his own meal. The rich had plenty and were drunken; the poor brought little or nothing and were hungry -- neither manifesting a single ounce of love toward each other. Paul soundly condemns their practice on two grounds. First, their meal highlighted their social divisions. Second, the meal, even had it not fallen under the first rebuke, was out of order because it was out of place. If they wished to have social feasts, they were to do it somewhere else, not in their assemblies. *"What, have you not houses to eat and to drink in? or despise ye the church of God and put them to shame that have not? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you? In this I praise ye not."* (1 Cor. 11:22). Thus we clearly may perceive that not only do social meals, even when they would qualify to be social meals, have no part in things religious. Nor have they, we may rightly necessarily conclude, any place in property churches have either rented or bought in which to worship God. The fact that the Corinthians were engaged in a social meal does not justify social meals in "fellowship halls" today. One simply cannot authorize a practice based upon an admitted similar practice, but one which was condemned by the apostle. If such social meals were condemned by the apostle in the first century, such social meals would be condemned by the apostle today.

Jim McDonald